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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BOGOTA 007712

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TAGS: [KJUS](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SNAR](#) [CO](#) [FARC](#) [ELN](#)

SUBJECT: PEACE COMMISSIONER DESCRIBES STATUS OF
HUMANITARIAN EXCHANGE AND PEACE TALKS WITH FARC AND ELN

REF: BOGOTA 7415

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood.

Reasons: 1.4 (b,d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo told Ambassador Wood August 12 that the GOC was making a sincere effort to reach an agreement with the FARC on the terms of a humanitarian exchange, and with the ELN on peace talks, but Restrepo is not confident of the GOC's short term prospects for success. Restrepo said the GOC has strengthened its hand with the FARC by, for the first time, obtaining support for its initiative from most of the hostages' families. In Restrepo's view, the FARC is not interested in striking a deal and is likely to derail the talks if they get started ("romper la mesa"). Restrepo believes the FARC will intensify its attacks if a Constitutional Court ruling permits President Uribe to run again because they are "obsessed" with preventing his reelection. In a late development, the FARC has rejected the government's latest offer, saying the proposed meeting could not take place "for military reasons," and pressing for a suspension of government military action for 30 days (vice the eight days in the government's proposal). On the ELN front, Restrepo characterized the GOC's latest offer as its strongest to date and argued that the ELN had no option other than negotiate, but internal divisions and uncertainty over Uribe's reelection could delay decisions. End summary.

GOC HUMANITARIAN EXCHANGE INITIATIVE GARNERING SUPPORT

2. (C) Restrepo told the Ambassador that the GOC's latest humanitarian exchange initiative is sincere and is garnering more support than any of the previous five such initiatives. (Note: The GOC has agreed to a proposal by a group of hostages' families to meet the FARC at Aures, a town of about 150 inhabitants some 23 km from Caicedonia in the Valle del Cauca. In Restrepo's view, families of the 14 Cali deputies who have been held for about 40 months are behind the selection of Aures. End note.) According to Restrepo, the FARC should be able to reach the proposed site of the meeting ("lugar del encuentro") easily because Aures lies slightly north and east of traditional FARC strongholds and has three principal access roads. The GOC military is satisfied that it can secure the area. Restrepo said the GOC will continue to reject FARC demands for a demilitarized zone in which to conduct talks ("despeje"), and will insist that FARC prisoners exchanged as part of a deal do not return to guerrilla ranks.

3. (C) Restrepo was especially pleased with the support the GOC initiative is now receiving from a significant section of hostages' families. In his view, the GOC has neutralized family criticisms and has four of the five principal groups of families on its side (with the exception of Neiva): those representing Bogota; Villavicencio; Valle; and police/armed forces detainees. He noted that family members whom he met recently in Aures were wearing T-shirts with the GOC slogan ("Caicedonia - lugar del encuentro") and they did not use FARC language ("despeje," or demilitarized zone) in their statements. Restrepo characterized Yolanda Pulecio, mother of prominent dual Colombian-French citizen and former Senator Ingrid Betancourt, as being emotionally affected by her daughter's captivity and said many hostage families view Pulecio as being interested only in her own daughter's release.

4. (C) Restrepo said neither France nor President of the Colombian Episcopal Conference, Monsignor Luis Augusto Castro, have played a constructive role in discussions associated with the hostages. Restrepo characterized the Monsignor's efforts as naive and unhelpful, in part because he frequently tells the GOC that the FARC will not budge therefore the GOC must make additional concessions. Restrepo insisted that, as in the paramilitary negotiation, force in the field and firmness at the table were necessary.

PROSPECTS FOR SHORT TERM SUCCESS ARE SLIM

15. (C) Restrepo doubted the FARC is interested in a humanitarian exchange. They are "obsessed" with preventing President Uribe's reelection. For the FARC, Restrepo said, defeating Uribe would mean defeating Colombia's leadership class and would force Uribe's successor to negotiate. Even if the FARC were to agree to meet the GOC at Aures or elsewhere, Restrepo said the two sides would need weeks or months of discussions on security guarantees and other matters before substantive meetings took place. Even if they did take place, the FARC would seek to derail the talks ("romper la mesa"). In Restrepo's view, it would be logical for the FARC to wait until the Constitutional Court has ruled on Uribe's right to seek immediate reelection before making significant decisions. In a statement dated August 14 from "the mountains of Colombia," the FARC rejected Aures as a meeting place for "military reasons". The FARC asked the families who had proposed Aures to now press the GOC to demilitarize the municipalities of Florida and Pradera for 30 days so that a meeting could take place there.

FARC PREPARING TO INTENSIFY ATTACKS

16. (C) Restrepo said the FARC may be planning 18-25 simultaneous attacks throughout Colombia. Their strategy would be to "make Colombia ungovernable" and thereby persuade Colombians that Uribe is incapable of ensuring their security and delivering government services. The attacks would include further operations against mayors, councilors, and armed forces detachments.

RESTREPO SAYS GOC OFFER TO ELN STRONGEST YET

17. (C) Restrepo said the latest offer to talk with the ELN is the GOC's strongest to date. The GOC offer, broached about a week ago, includes discussions to be held outside the country and a military cease-fire against ELN militants if the ELN agrees to stop kidnapping and attacks against civilians. Restrepo expressed the view that the ELN would find it difficult to say no to an offer that included a cease-fire. The ELN has yet to respond. The Peace Commissioner was grateful for the Ambassador's reiteration of USG support for the GOC effort.

18. (C) Restrepo said the GOC has offered to release imprisoned ELN leader Francisco Galan into Medellin for two months to try to persuade the group's leadership and other ELN sympathizers to accept the GOC offer, and Galan seems inclined to agree. Restrepo downplayed concerns that Galan would "escape" since this is not the first time Galan has been granted "parole" of this nature. Moreover, Galan enjoys a spacious two-level "prison" with eight bedrooms, exercise equipment, internet, and telephone services, and relishes his status as a key player in peace talks.

ELN HAS NO ALTERNATIVE BUT COULD DELAY DECISIONS

19. (C) Restrepo compared the current state of the ELN with the AUC of a few years ago; it is vulnerable and has no alternative but to negotiate with the GOC. The ELN's leadership is weak and Colombia's legal leftist parties are increasing their pressure on the ELN to come to the table. Restrepo warned, however, that divisions within the ELN could make it difficult for the GOC to manage the process. For example, the influential Occidental Bloc, known as the "war bloc," is against discussing peace with the government. A location for discussions has not been agreed upon, but Restrepo said the ELN's preference for Venezuela as a meeting place could cause problems for the GOC. As with the FARC, uncertainty over Uribe's reelection could delay the ELN's decisions.

WOOD